UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA

ABN 51 824 544 079

410 Brunswick Street,
Fitzroy, Victoria 3065
Phone:(03) 9419 8811
Fax:(03) 9419 9258
Email: ufunational@ufunat.asn.au
www.ufua.asn.au
President: Mick Farrell
Secretary: Peter Marshall

22 January 2013

Committee Chairperson
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
P O Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Chair

Recent Trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events

1. Please find attached an interim submission on behalf of the UFUA which includes three specifically commissioned reports:

2. This is an interim submission as the UFUA has commissioned a comprehensive report to examine and project the capacity and capability of firefighters in the context of climate change in the near future. It will include consideration of the following issues:

    - Capacity and capability
    - The necessary qualifications and competencies of firefighters
    - National and international accreditation
    - Interoperability of the provision of fire services within states, between states and territories and internationally
    - Mutual aid agreements for the effective and safe deployment of qualified personnel in a timely manner
    - National coordination of resources to ensure uniformity of standards and the maximum use of allocated resources
    - Policy regarding the sustainability of deployment of firefighters including fatigue management
    - Socio-economic factors in relation to response and resilience
    - Costs of severe weather events including the provision of fire services, economic loss due to business interruption, indirect costs to the community and business sector.

3. We understand that the Committee is due to report back to the Senate in March 2013. We respectfully request that the Senate Committee accept this submission and the three consultancy reports as an interim submission and to consider the comprehensive report which it is expected to be received at the end of February 2013.

4. We would like the opportunity to appear before the Senate Committee to discuss the interim and comprehensive reports.

5. Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss any of the above further.

Yours sincerely

Peter Marshall
National Secretary

United Firefighters Union of Australia

INTERIM SUBMISSION

TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEES

ON

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

FOR THE INQUIRY INTO

RECENT TRENDS IN AND PREPAREDNESS FOR EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

INDEX PAGE

1.0 Executive Summary/Recommendations 03

2.0 Introduction 04

3.0 Background 06
The role of fire services
Standards of response
Training and qualifications

4.0 Recent trends in extreme weather events 10

5.0 The preparedness and adequacy of resources in the emergency services sector to prevent and respond to extreme weather events; and the current roles and effectiveness of the division of responsibilities between different levels of government (federal, state and local) to manage extreme weather events. 11

- Capacity and capability
  - Qualifications and competencies
  - Interoperability
  - National and International accreditation
  - Equipment and resources
  - Policy on fatigue management

6.0 The costs of extreme weather impacts including social and economic impacts 17

- Socio economic factors
- Indirect costs to the community and business sector
- Economic loss due to business interruption

7.0 Summary 18

ATTACHMENT ONE Interim Report Firefighters and Climate Change
ATTACHMENT TWO Draft Report for the UFUA on the Merit of a National Registration Board for Firefighting
ATTACHMENT THREE The Cost of Fire

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Preparedness inlcudes the capacity and capability of fire services throughout Australia. Capacity and capability requires an analysis of the required number of operational firefighters, resources, equipment and the level of qualifications and competencies necessary to be able to respond appropriately to any extreme weather event safely and effectively.

1.2. Projections based on Estimated Resident population (ERP) and climate change an increase of 28-40 % in operational firefighters in Victoria alone is forecasted to meet increase bushfire activity alone by 2026. Further analysis on an Australia-wide basis and taking into account other extreme weather events including bushfire is currently being undertaken and is expected to be provided to the Senate Committee at the end of February 2013.

1.3. National coordination of firefighting standards including qualifications and competencies, resources and uniformity of equipment is necessary in order for interoperability to be effective and to ensure the maximum usage of allocated resources between states and territories and within states and territories.

1.4. There are currently significant differences between fire services within states and between states and territories which are barriers to the effectiveness and practicalities of interoperability.

1.5. A national body such as a professional firefighter registration board would coordinate firefighting standards, qualifications and competencies as well as be an independent authority for the development of protocols and policies to ensure the maximum usage of resources between states and territories can be achieved.

1.6. The analysis of the effectiveness and value of the provision of fire services includes the economic costs of fire and other incidents including extreme weather events. The report recommends the following be acted upon by federal government:

I. Comprehensively evaluate cost of fire as a proportion of GDP as a starting point for an evaluation of the cost benefits of improving the quality of fire prevention expenditure

II. Implement a national policy and empirical basis for resourcing fire protection and suppression nation-wide

III. Ensure that fire services' funding levels and the distribution of costs by States have the least detrimental impact on the overall and fragile elements of the economy

IV. Address the moral hazard and increased cost arising from cost shifting by State Governments

V. Investigate the economic benefits of a national system of skills and qualifications supported by a registration board.

VI. Minimise the consequences and effects of business interruption on communities as a result of fire and other emergencies including severe weather events

1.7. Research is necessary to analyze the effects of climate change the requirements to protect the community including response capability and capacity and methods. Such research should involve all facets of emergency response so that all aspects and requirements are considered and are not dominated by fire service concerns including levels of funding etc. Current research structures are inadequate. For example the Bushfire CRC which was established to conduct research into the social, environmental, and economic impacts of bushfires has become interwoven with the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Council (AFAC) limiting the input into the research and the considerations of the nature of the research to be undertaken. The current Bushfire CRC should be abolished and an inclusive research body established.

2.0 Introduction

2.1. The United Firefighters Union of Australia ("the UFUA") is a registered federal union of career firefighters and others employed by fire services in Australia.

2.2. The UFUA has eight branches in Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria, ACT, New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and an Aviation sector branch. Each branch has very high level of union membership with the majority of branches averaging around 95 to 100 percent membership of the relevant workforce.

2.3. The UFUA represents firefighters employed on a permanent full time basis, permanent part time basis and on a casual basis by fire services including aviation and defence.

2.4. In addition, the UFUA also represents other employees of fire services including, but not limited to, emergency call centres, fire safety officers, mechanics, administrative support and technical support, and hospitality.

2.5. The terms of reference of this Senate Inquiry provides a significant opportunity for the Australian Government to be informed into the ramifications for and the requirements of fire services in order to meet the needs of response.

2.6. **This is an interim submission.** The UFUA has commissioned a comprehensive report to project the required number of firefighters throughout Australia taking into account population growth and climate change as well as the downturn in volunteerism. That report will also canvas the following issues:

- Capacity and capability
- The necessary qualifications and competencies of firefighters
- National and international accreditation
- Interoperability of the provision of fire services within states, between states and territories and internationally
- Mutual aid agreements for the effective and safe deployment of qualified personnel in a timely manner
- National coordination of resources to ensure uniformity of standards and the maximum use of allocated resources
- Policy regarding the sustainability of deployment of firefighters including fatigue management
- Socio-economic factors in relation to response and resilience
- Costs of severe weather events including the provision of fire services, economic loss due to business interruption, indirect costs to the community and business sector.

2.7. Due to the time constraints for submissions, we were unable to commission the above report to be completed by 18 January 2013. **However, we expect to receive the report by the end of February 2013 for submissions to the inquiry. Therefore we respectfully request that the Senate Committee considers the report to be submitted at the end of February 1013.**

2.8. In order to provide some analysis of key issues for the interim submission, the UFUA has commissioned and includes three other reports:

(1) A report into the projected numbers of firefighters needed in Victoria based on population growth and movement and impact of climate change (ATTACHMENT ONE);

- In 2009 the UFUA Victoria Branch commissioned a report[1] to project the required staffing numbers of operational firefighters in Victoria for the period 2009-2026 taking into account population movement and climate change.

[1] December 2009 The University of Sydney Workplace Research Centre Concise Report to inform the United Firefighters Union (Vic) Staffing Claim for MFB and CFA Paid Firefighters.

- Upon notification of this Senate Inquiry the UFUA sought an update of that report to provide an updated case study of projected firefighter numbers in Victoria.

(2) An interim report on the merits, benefit and scope of a national registration board of professional firefighters (ATTACHMENT TWO);

(3) An interim report on the Economic Cost of Fire (ATTACHMENT THREE);

2.9. The more comprehensive report expected to be available at the end of February 2013 will include forecasting of the required numbers of firefighters states and territories and the consideration of the factors listed in paragraph 2.6 above.

2.10. We respectfully request that the Senate Committee consider the more comprehensive report upon submission at the end of February 2013 prior to reporting back to the Senate as scheduled in mid March 2013.

3.0 Background

The role of fire services

3.1. State and Territory governments provide a range of emergency management activities through fire service organisations, including prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

The role of fire service organisations varies across jurisdictions and includes involvement in an expanding range of activities including:

- developing building fire safety codes and inspecting fire safety equipment and practices
- training and educating the community to achieve community awareness and behavioural change in relation to fire and road safety issues
- assisting individuals and communities to prepare for bushfires and other hazards
- responding to structure, bush, vehicle and other fires
- providing rural land management advice on the role and use of fire
- providing road crash rescue and other rescue services
- managing hazardous material incidents
- chemical, biological and radiological incidents
- administering legislation relating to fire safety, hazardous materials facilities and hazard mitigation
- investigating fire cause and origin
- wide ranging industry research activities
- a number of specialist rescue capabilities, including Urban Search and Rescue
- providing emergency medical services such as Community First Responder
- Counter-terrorist preparedness work with Police agencies and consequence management relating to a terrorist attack.

3.2. In terms of extreme weather events, firefighters respond to the following:

- Medical emergencies as first responders (medical conditions arising from extreme heat in the elderly and very young)
- Bushfires
- Floods
- Storm surges
- Rescue operations

3.3. To maximize the prevention of loss of life and minimize damage to property, fire services mandate a quick response by applying standards for their firefighters to respond to emergencies. The response time standard is crucial to maximize the potential for saving life by performing a successful rescue whilst also minimizing damage to a structure and interruption to business.

Standards of response

3.4. Currently there is no requirement for any service to adhere to any national or international standard of response.

3.5. There are international and national standards that set out the minimum levels of response capacity and capability.

In fire incidents capability is suppression capability which is "an expression of how much fire- fighting power can be put into action when there is a fire. It includes the amount of apparatus, equipment, and personnel available; the time needed to respond and place equipment in action; the water supply, the application of strategy and tactics, the level of training; and all of the components that add up to effective fire ground operations[2].

3.6. For example:

3.4.1. NFPA 1710 is the Standard for the Organisation and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments. NFPA is the equivalent for volunteer departments.

- Includes a requirement for fire services to maintain a statement that establishes the services the fire department is to provide and the delivery of such services[3] including fire suppression, airport rescue and firefighting services, marine rescue and firefighting services, wildland fire suppression services and intercommunity organization.

- Includes performance objectives of response times for fire suppression and emergency medical incidents.[4]

[2] NFPA 1710 A.5.2.1.1
[3] NFPA 1710 4.1.1
[4] NFPA 1710 4.1.2.1.1

- Includes minimum staffing levels of the numbers necessary for firefighting performance relative to the expected fire-fighting conditions taking into account the following factors[5]:
  - Life hazard to the populace protected
  - Provision of safe and effective firefighting performance conditions for the firefighters
  - Nature, configuration, hazards, and internal protection of the properties involved
  - Types of fire ground tactics and evolutions employed as a standard procedure, type of apparatus used, and results expected to be obtained at the fire scene.

- That minimum staffing includes the staffing necessary to ensure sufficient firefighters are assigned, on duty and able to safely and effectively respond.[6] That includes supervisory ranks to be included in the minimum number per appliance.[7]

- Minimum staffing is based on the minimum levels for emergency operations for safety and effectiveness and efficiency and ranges from basic firefighting (pumping and delivering water) to those in jurisdictions with tactical hazards, high hazard occupancies, high incident frequencies, geographical restrictions and other pertinent factors. Staffing for specialist appliances and equipment or where the firefighters are expected to perform multiple roles or specialized roles additional staffing is required.[8]

- Additional staffing is needed for the capability to deploy for additional alarm assignments (beyond the capability of the initial incident alarm assignment) such as search and rescue, ventilation and preservation of property, accountability for personnel, and escalated situations.[9]

- Staffing for wildland fire suppression is to be determined through analysis of the following factors[10]:
  - Life hazard to the populace protected
  - Provision of safe and effective firefighting performance conditions for the firefighters
  - Number of trained response personnel available including mutual aid resources

---

[5] NFPA 1710 5.2.1
[6] NFPA 1710 5.2.1.2.1
[7] NFPA 5.2.1.2.2
[8] NFPA 5.2.2.
[9] NFPA 5.2.3
[10] NFPA 1710 5.7.4.1.1.

- Potential property loss
- Nature, configuration, hazards and internal protection of properties involved
- Types of wildland tactics employed as standard procedure, types of apparatus used and results expected to be obtained at the fire scene
- Topography, vegetation, and terrain in the response area(s)

Training and qualifications

3.7. Fire services throughout Australia have different training structures for career firefighters. While there is a national qualification and competency framework, the application of that framework to specific ranks within fire services varies. In all fire services there is a marked difference in the training and qualification structure for career and volunteer firefighters. For career firefighters time of service is integral to the qualification and competency framework, i.e. in order to be able to qualify to train for a higher rank the firefighter must have first completed the required competencies, qualifications and time of service for the lower rank.

3.8. Career firefighters undergo extensive training via an initial recruit course which is approximately 17 weeks followed by a probationary period of 12 months. The time period necessary varies from fire service to fire service.

3.9. For example the Metropolitan Fire & Emergency Services Board in Victoria, additional to the recruit course, require successful candidates to undertake a continuation training programme in accordance with the national curriculum (Public Safety Training Package). This requires a further three years of study and training to become a qualified firefighter.

3.10. After four years, and upon satisfactory completion of the required training, a career firefighter obtains the rank of qualified firefighter. This qualification is referred to as Certificate III in Public Safety (Firefighting in Emergency Operations). Firefighters can also undertake additional specialist training in accordance with the relevant fire agency specific requirements, such as heavy rescue unit, ladder platform etc. The four year requirement to become qualified as a firefighter is similar to that of an apprenticeship for a trade.

3.11. After the initial 17-week recruit course, successful candidates are deployed to fire stations for operational experience where they perform emergency response duties under supervision. This includes, but is not limited to, responding to emergencies such as chemical spills, structure fires, car fires, building collapse, non-structure fires and medical emergencies.

3.12. The firefighter then moves up through the ranks upon completion of service, training, qualifications and meeting required competencies. This includes specialist response (such as marine, swift water rescue etc) and management of incidents including

significant incidents such as large bushfires, rescues and response to severe weather events.

3.13. In some states firefighters are also trained first responders. For example in Victoria MFB firefighters will be called as first responders to medical emergencies and will maintain the patient until ambulance and paramedics arrive.

3.14. Firefighters also perform a wide range of fire safety and public awareness initiatives including structured programmes delivered to primary school children. These programmes are commonly referred to as "Fire Ed".

4.0 Recent Trends in extreme weather events

4.1. The size, severity, timing, location and impacts of disasters are difficult to predict. Scientific modeling suggests that climate change will likely resulting an increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events"[11]

4.2. An extreme weather event is part of the classification of a natural disaster which is *"a serious disruption to a community or region cause d by the impact of a naturally occurring rapid onset event that threatens or causes death, injury or damage to property or the environment and which requires significant and coordinated multi-agency and community response. Such serious disruption cab ne caused by any one, or a combination , of the following natural hazards: bushfire; earthquake; flood; storm; cyclone; storm surge; landslide; tsunami; meteorite strike or tornado."*[12]

4.3. Firefighters respond to all extreme weather events and as first responder are also required to respond to emergencies resulting from heat waves.

4.4. Australian governments through COAG research have accepted the likely impact of climate change on bush fire seasons. *"Climate change is likely to increase the frequency, intensity and size of bushfires in much of Australia and the future"*[13].

4.5. Fire risk is influenced by a number of factors – including fuels, terrain, land management, suppression and weather. Fire-weather risk relates to how a combination of weather variables influences the risk of a fire stating or its rate of spread, intensity or difficulty of suppression. "[14]

4.6 **The UFUA interim report Firefighters and Climate Change (ATTACHMENT ONE) sets out the changing nature of risk.**

---

[11] 2012 Report on Government Services, Australian Government Productivity Commission Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision., Part D Emergency Management Sector Summary, pages D11, D12.
[12] August 2002 Natural Disasters in Australia: Reforming mitigation, relief and recovery arrangements – A Report to the Council of Australian Governments by a High Level Official's Group, page 4.
[13] 2004 COAG Report of the National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management" page 3
[14] December 2005 Commonwealth Scientific and industrial Research Organisation CSIRO "Climate Change impacts on fire-weather in south-east Australia" page 5.

5.0 The preparedness and adequacy of resources in the emergency services sector to prevent and respond to extreme weather events; and the current roles and effectiveness of the division of responsibilities between different levels of government (federal, state and local) to manage extreme weather events.

- **Capacity and capability**
  - **Qualifications and competencies**
  - **Interoperability**
  - **National and International accreditation**
  - **Equipment and resources**
  - **Policy on fatigue management**

CAPACITY

5.1. *"Preparedness – the result of measures to ensure, if an emergency occurs, that communities, resources and services are capable of responding to, and coping with, the effects. Activities that contribute to preparedness include: public education and training; emergency detection and response planning (including the installation of smoke alarms and/or sprinklers); hazardous chemicals and material classification, and the inspection of storage and handling arrangements; the exercising, training and testing of emergency services personnel; and standby and resource deployment and maintenance. Preparedness also involves establishing equipment standards and monitoring adherence to those standards".*[15]

5.2. Integral to preparedness is the adequate provision of emergency services. Capacity and capability includes the appropriate number of firefighters and the ability of those firefighters to protect the community, including any forecasted risk such as increased risk of extreme weather events due to climate change.

5.3. In Australia, in particular in rural areas and in some urban fringe areas, there is a reliance on volunteer firefighters. Some states have only career firefighters staffing fire stations 24/7 (such as the CFA and MFB in Victoria), with volunteers firefighters in the rural areas. NSW has career firefighters and retained firefighters who are paid a weekly retainer for being available on call and then paid an hourly rate for any turnout. In Queensland there are career firefighters, auxiliary firefighters (retained) and rural firefighters (volunteers).

[15] 2012 Report on Government Services, Australian Government Productivity Commission Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision., Part D Emergency Management Sector Summary, page D13.

5.4. The Productivity Commission reported that in 2010-2011 17,545 full time equivalent paid personnel were employed by fire service organizations and 13,229 were paid firefighters.[16]

5.5. For bushfire response in particular Australia relies heavily upon a volunteer firefighter force. However an aging population and economic pressures and other social issues such as education levels, English as second language and employment requirements are all issues negatively affecting the rate of volunteering in Australia.[17]

5.6. In 2009, as a result of evidence produced and assessed by a Disputes Panel a Board of Reference determined that the number of CFA operational firefighters and fire stations in Victoria were inadequate to protect the community. That decision was made after consideration of significant empirical evidence including an analysis of response times, locations and projected population growth corridors. It identified 10 stations that needed to become 24/7 operations with career staff, proposed new stations and an increase in career firefighter numbers per shift in 15 other stations.[18]

5.7. Taking into account the findings of the Dispute Panel the CFA sought funding from the Victorian Government for an additional 684 career firefighters – almost double the amount of career firefighters employed at the time. This request for funding for a significant increase in operational firefighters was also put before the 2009 Bushfire Royal Commission investigating the Black Saturday fires including the preparedness and response.

5.11. **The Interim Report Firefighters and Climate Change (ATTAHCMENT ONE) sets out the projected increase of firefighters for 2009-2026.** In Victoria it is now projected that an additional 660 to 950 (a 28-40 % increase) FTE career firefighters will be needed in Victoria between 2012 and 2026 to meet the needs of the growing population and effects of climate change. When the trends of the decline in volunteerism are taken into account a further 240 operational firefighters will be required.[19]

Capability

5.12 Preparedness for severe weather events includes an assessment of the ability to call on resources within fire services, across states and territories, and internationally in order to be able to draw on or access a range of qualified and experienced personnel including specialist skills.

---

[16] 2012 Report on Government Services, Australian Government Productivity Commission Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Chapter 9, 9.6.

[17] 2012 Volunteering Australia, State of Volunteering in Australia, 2.2. Trends in Volunteer Participation, page 7.

[18] CFA UFU Board of Reference Decision 7 April 2009

[19] January 2013 National Institute of Economic and Industry Research Interim Report Firefighters and Climate Change.

"State and Territory and local governments provide emergency management services to the community through a range of emergency services organizations. The governance and reporting lines of emergency services organizations vary across jurisdictions. These organizations range from government department to statutory authorities. In some instances, non-government organisation also provide emergency management (and other ambulance event) services as such St John Ambulance in WA and NT."[20]

5.13. A 2002 COAG commissioned report that assessed Australia's approach to natural disaster management found there were *"strong emergency services career and volunteer sectors which provide a speedy, visible and respected capacity to respond to natural disasters"* but there were a number of short failings including a *"lack of effective inter-governmental; and in some cases intra-governmental machinery to support a coordinated national approach to disaster management".*[21]

5.14. Australia has a history of sending assistance to states, territories and other nations in need as a result of natural disasters and severe weather events. However, the ability for firefighters to be effectively deployed interstate and internationally is hampered by the lack of standardization of qualifications, training, equipment, resources, standards and practices and procedures.

5.15. There is no standard incident management system throughout Australia. As such we have a situation in Australia where differences in management of fire grounds, resources, equipment and training, even radio incident code calls can limit and restrict the availability of appropriately trained and experience firefighters.

5.16. The lack of consistency between even fire services within states became apparent and was identified by the Bushfires Royal Commission as a contributing factor in failures of the response during the Black Saturday Victorian Bushfires. Crucial factors such as the lack of ability to communicate adequately between fire services were highlighted. As a result the Royal Commission recommended that *"the CFA and Department of Sustainability and Environment standardize their operating systems and information and communications technologies with the aim of achieving greater efficiency and interoperability between agencies."* [22] The report promoted interoperability between all fire services in Victoria in order to provide more effective response to any emergency.

5.17. The inconsistencies between fire services not only limits the ability to effectively deploy firefighters inter-state and internationally for extreme weather events but ultimately impacts on the level of protection to the community and the costs resulting from such disasters. It impacts on the safety of the community and the firefighters.

---

[20] 2012 Report on Government Services, Australian Government Productivity Commission Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision., Part D Emergency Management Sector Summary, page D6.

[21] August 2002 Natural Disasters in Australia: Reforming mitigation, relief and recovery arrangements – A Report to the Council of Australian Governments by a High Level Official's Group, pages 9 and 10.

[22] 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommendation 22

5.18 The lack of a nationally coordinated firefighting profession means that firefighters deployed inter-state are working alongside firefighters that may be trained to a different level and working to different control and command structures and operations. Firefighters must be able to rely upon on the experience and decision-making of the other firefighters at the scene. It is paramount for firefighter health and safety. It can be the difference between life and death.

5.19 Interoperability and consistency cannot be achieved purely by legislating or promoting fire services to work more closely together. It will require national co-ordination of standards and requirements that are the cornerstone of an effective fire service.

5.20. An effective fire service requires professional, appropriately trained and qualified firefighters with standardized methods of operation and resources. In order to have a fully interoperable resource of firefighters and equipment the standardisation of training, qualifications, methods of operation and resources is also required.

5.21. Other professions, and in particular those that provide specific services to the community and public, have qualifications and requirements of practice governed and maintained through professional organizations – law societies, institutes of teaching, and other registration boards. These organisations conduct a range of functions including governance, setting and monitoring qualification standards, providing policy advice, providing policy and advice on industry-related matters and ensuring the quality and integrity of the profession is maintained. These organizations protect the public interest.

5.22. Firefighting is a profession requiring significant training, qualifications, skills and experience. The quality of that training and experience can be the difference between life and death for the community and for the other firefighters at the incident scene. Therefore it is imperative that regardless of where the firefighter is trained, or worked, that firefighter is trained and qualified to perform the duties of response.

5.23. The goal of interoperability cannot be achieved without uniformity of standards including training, qualifications, required experience and operating methods.

5.24. The ability to deploy the most appropriate resources to the area of most need, for example in times of response to extreme weather events will also assist in coordinated disaster management frameworks and maximize the use of skills to minimize the detriment and loss to the community. Therefore there are also economic benefits to a national system of skills and qualifications and maintenance of a professional framework.[23]

[23] January 2013 Ruth Kershaw, The Economic Cost of Fire, Factors to be incorporated into a National Police on Fire Services Resourcing.

5.25. **The UFUA commissioned Report on the Merit of a National Registration Board for Firefighting[24] (ATTACHMENT TWO) took into account the effects of climate change and the likely increase in extreme weather events when outlining the necessity and merits of such an independent body that "stipulates and monitors set training for firefighters".**

5.26. The report found that the benefits of a nationally coordinated professional body included:[25]

- Consistency of competency throughout Australia
- Improved interoperability through consistency of training and qualifications
- National coordination to ensure uniformity of standards and monitoring processes
- National coordination to ensure maximum use of resources between States and Territories
- National accreditation
- Governance of national standards
- Ability to pursue international accreditation
- Ability to coordinate mutual aid agreements with qualified personnel within Australia and internationally.

5.27. The report highlighted a nationally coordinated and monitored training and qualification framework was necessary for the quality of service to the community and safety of firefighting.

> *The proposed national firefighting board would administer the registration of freighting proficiency and safe and effective firefighting services is integral to the protection of the community. The firefighting registration board would act as a further risk reduction and mitigation body for effective, targeted strategies to engage and communicate with at-risk communities about the risks posed by bushfire and the actions people can take to prepare and respond to the bushfire threat.* [26]*Firefighting board activities could be broadened and strengthened in time to include firefighting equipment. This would further enhance national interoperability.*

5.28. The Registration Board could also govern and enforce national and international standards of protective clothing, equipment and operations such as fire response times. This will also greatly assist with interoperability and deployment between states and territories in times of extreme weather events.

---

[24] January 2013 Shea Consulting and Business Skills Victoria Draft Report for the United Firefighters Union of Australia on the Merit of a National Registration Board for Firefighting.

[25] January 2013 Shea Consulting and Business Skills Victoria Draft Report for the United Firefighters Union of Australia on the Merit of a National Registration Board for Firefighting, page 6

[26] January 2013 Shea Consulting and Business Skills Victoria Draft Report for the United Firefighters Union of Australia on the Merit of a National Registration Board for Firefighting, page 8

5.29. Extreme weather events can mean incidents that require front line response for days, even weeks, particularly in large bushfires. The national coordination of standards would mean that firefighters can rely upon known standards for deployment, operation and management of personnel at the scene.

5.30. For example, fatigue management is a significant issue when managing a large scale event. Some fire services have fatigue management policies, others are lacking. A firefighter's training and experience in terms of the expectations of length of time at the front line including hydration, food, and rest is critical to the health and wellbeing of the firefighter. There is no consistency of the approach on fatigue management between services and states.

5.31. Such a Board would be instrumental in aligning requirements of qualification and experience for international accreditation and that in itself would assist with international deployments due to an understanding and recognition of international standards both in training and in response.

Research

5.32. In order to have a consistent approach to the response to extreme weather events, research should be targeted to ensure there is a comprehensive understanding of the predicted events and the impacts.

5.33. There is a need to review current research structures into the impact on emergency services due to the impact of extreme weather events. The Bushfire CRC was a government-funded research centre established to research into the social, environmental and economic impacts of bushfires. However this organization is not inclusive as it is clearly interwoven with the employer organization representative AFAC. In order for effective research to take place to provide results of value, all parties involved in such events as bushfire should be involved in determining the nature of the research to be undertaken and how that research is achieved. A new research body should be established that meets those objectives.

6.0 The costs of extreme weather impacts including social and economic impacts

- **Socio economic factors**
- **Indirect costs to the community and business sector**
- **Economic loss due to business interruption**

6.1. The UFUA has commissioned a report into issues and factors to be taken into account when analyzing economic loss in preparation of this submission to the Senate Committee - Economist Ruth Kershaw's report *"The Economic Cost of Fire – Factors to be incorporated into a National Policy on Fire Services Resourcing is* ***ATTACHMENT THREE.***

6.2. The Kershaw report determined the following recommendations for Federal Government:

I. A comprehensive evaluation of the cost of fire as a proportion of GDP as a starting point for an evaluation of the cost benefits of improving the quality of fire prevention expenditure

II. The implementation of national policy for the resourcing of fire protection and suppression based on empirical evidence

III. Ensuring fire services' funding levels and the distribution of costs by States have the least detrimental impact on the overall and fragile elements of the economy

IV. Address the moral hazard and increased cost arising from cost shifting by State Governments

V. Investigate the economic benefits of a national system of skills and qualifications supported by a registration board.

VI. Minimise the consequences and effects of business interruption on communities as a result of fire and other emergencies including severe weather events

7.0 Summary

7.1. This is an interim submission. The purpose of this submission is to include three consultancy reports and to set the foundation for a forthcoming comprehensive report that is expected to be provided to the Senate Committee by the end of February 2013.

7.2. The consultancy reports provided demonstrate the following:

- Climate change will require significant increase in firefighting numbers using Victoria as a case study
- Australia lacks independent national coordination of the capability and capacity of fire services.
- A national body governing provision of services including the qualifications and training necessary to provide and maintain the necessary professionalism of firefighting.
- Currently there are significant barriers to effective deployment between states that cannot be addressed on a state by state basis
- A national body is necessary in order for any genuine interoperability and coordination of fire services to be achieved.
- Economic loss due to fire is a key consideration when determining the provision of emergency services to adequately protect the community.
- A national policy/framework is required to ensure adequate funding of fire services and appropriate sources of funding.

7.3. That comprehensive report to be provided to the Senate Committee in February 2013 will include:

- A projection of the number of firefighters required throughout Australia taking into account population movements and climate change.
- Key issues for consideration of appropriate response for climate change:
    - Capacity and capability
    - Qualifications and training
    - Interoperability
    - Mutual aid
    - National and international accreditation
    - Resourcing
    - Economic cost of fire and social impact

Peter Marshall

UFUA National Secretary